

Testimony Re: Raised House Bill No. 6659 (HB 6659)

**AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR
THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND
MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

**Submitted to:
The Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Committee**

**Submitted by: Yanidsi Velez, New England Regional Director,
Hispanic Federation**

February 16, 2022

Good morning, Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, Exum and Paris, and all distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony today. My name is Yanidsi Velez, and I am the New England Regional Director for Hispanic Federation (HF); a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance Hispanic communities through our programs and our policy advocacy efforts. HF's testimony is also informed by leading community-based member organizations and partners who serve and advocate for Latinos, and who are committed to improving our community's outcomes and opportunities in the State of Connecticut.

I am here to advocate in full support of Raised HB No. 6659, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR – specifically to ensure that the Secretary of the State (SOTS) is allocated the needed \$1.95 million dollars in the Biennium to implement the Connecticut Voter Rights Act (CVRA).

The absence of the protections under the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 has left a sizable portion of voters vulnerable to discriminatory practices and voter suppression measures across the nation. The VRA was enacted to combat a wide range of barriers and burdens that exclude voters of color from the electoral process, yet it has come under attack recently with important provisions that fought discriminatory practices being stripped away.

Yet, Connecticut can continue to lead and serve as one of the states with the best voter protections by codifying into law and improving upon the anti-discriminatory protections included in the VRA. However, none of this can happen unless the Connecticut General Assembly adequately appropriates the necessary fund(s) allocation to implement the measures outlined in Raised Bill No. 6659.



The Connecticut Voting Rights Act– introduced this year in the Elections Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly’s 2023 Regular Session – is supported by a broad coalition of racial justice, civil rights, and voting rights advocates with the aim of addressing systemic barriers to equally exercising the right to vote and racial inequalities to the ballot box. These measures include:

- Launching a “preclearance” program that requires local governments with recent records of discrimination to prove that proposed voting changes will not harm voters of color before they can go into effect.
- Expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency. Research shows that ballots are already often confusing and complex even for proficient English speakers, and that people with limited English proficiency face even greater barriers at the ballot and in casting their vote. More than 275,000 Connecticut residents statewide have limited English proficiency – including immigrants and indigenous people. The CVRA would expand the number of towns that must provide language assistance to voters. This measure would ensure equitable access to all voters despite language proficiency.
- Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, or obstruction. If the CVRA is passed and funded, anyone that violates the voting rights and/or obstructs access to the ballot, could be held liable in civil court by the voter.
- The CVRA would create a central hub of voting information for the state. This online hub would expand to include an interactive map of polling site locations and ballot drop box locations for each election in each municipality and lists of districts or geographic areas served by each polling site and/or ballot drop box, making it more accessible to vote to our voices heard.
- Requiring employers to give an individual time off from work to vote on Election Day. Currently, our state has no laws allowing employees to take time off to vote and the CVRA would remedy that by providing opportunities – especially for hourly wage earners who stand to lose paid time if they want to exercise their right to vote. This particularly impacts the ability of low to moderate income voters, especially individuals who work scheduled shifts or hourly wage earners who stand to lose money if they exercise their right to vote.

In conclusion, funding the CVRA means that the 1.4 million residents in Connecticut who form the Rising American Electorate (RAE)¹ – single head of household women, voters under 34 years old, and minorities (as defined by the Census) – would gain protections that are not assured under current state law. For Latinos and other Limited English Proficient (LEP) voters in the state, a Connecticut Voting Rights Act would ensure that the shortage of trained bilingual poll workers is addressed by increasing language assistance at the polls that have a high concentration of LEP

¹ https://www.voterparticipation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Report.VPC_RA-E-Demo-Report.2017.12.04-firev.pdf



voters. The CTVRA would also expand opportunities and diversify our state's poll workers, making them more representative of Connecticut's RAE.

All the measures outlined above would indubitably scale up the state's elections infrastructure and ensure Connecticut remains a leader in voter rights., In order for the CVRA to be implemented successfully the SOTS needs \$1.95 million allocated in the Biennial Budget. The funding requested is a with a conservative expenditure of 0.78 cents per registered voter over the next two years. Yet- the return on the investment in our state's democracy is invaluable.

Thank you for your time and consideration.